

# ***Building a Relationship with your Community***



## **BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR COMMUNITY**

It's not enough to "build better communities," you have to build a relationship *with* your community as well.

### **IDENTIFY YOUR COMMUNITY**

In order to build a relationship with your community, you must first identify who they are and what your organization's relationship is with them. As a CRA, DDA, DIA, Main Street Program, etc., the entire community — from legislators and councilmen to business owners and homeowners — is your audience. Because redevelopment affects your entire city, and not just the community redevelopment area, it is critical that you "keep everyone in the loop."

### **INCLUDE YOUR COMMUNITY**

It is important that you provide the members of your community with an opportunity to be heard. Whether you are in the design stages of a project or the final stages of completion, letting the community know that you *want* to hear what *they* have to say is invaluable.

Opportunities for the community's input include:

- public meetings or workshops
- monthly meetings with local business owners
- monthly meetings with local homeowners' association
- comment cards and/or suggestion boxes
- presentations to civic groups

### **INFORM YOUR COMMUNITY**

Recognize that you are an organization that survives by the success of your projects, the support of your local government and the community's satisfaction with your work. Therefore, you want to let people know about these successes and/or your plans for success so that you can receive support and thus, earn satisfaction from your community.

Get out into your community and conduct presentations with local organizations. Presentations should be well prepared with a brief PowerPoint and an accompanying script highlighting who you are, what you have done, what you plan to do and the current/future impact and benefits it will bring to your audience (specifically), as well as to the community as a whole. Customize your presentation as much as possible. Put your best foot forward and feature your video, designers' renderings, before and after photos, and more. If available, bring brochures, fact sheets and other supporting materials you can hand out or leave behind.

Steps for success:

1. Identify your spokespeople.
2. Create organizational contact lists. Members on this list may include:
  - Social service-oriented groups (e.g., Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions/Elks Clubs, etc.)
  - Faith-based organizations
  - Trade associations
  - Chambers of Commerce, tourist development councils and economic development councils

- Leadership Florida (statewide) and local Leadership groups
  - Community involvement groups (e.g., Neighborhood and Homeowners' Associations)
  - Associations of developers, builders and realtors
3. Gather support materials for presentations.
  4. Initiate contact with organizations, by mail and/or phone, to offer speakers and schedule presentations. (Note: Find out if there are other opportunities to get your message out to the group, such as exhibiting at meetings, workshops and conferences or placing information in the publication for the organization).
  5. Keep your appointments. Remember that you are the face of your organization. No one likes a "no-show."

## **INVITE YOUR COMMUNITY**

Everybody loves to receive an invitation. Hosting special events can be your ticket to becoming the talk of the town.

Possible events include:

- Downtown parties
- Grand openings
- Ribbon cuttings
- Art shows
- Music festivals

Find the niche for your event. Remember holidays, seasons and your community's identity (e.g., Cape Coral. It's just paradise.). Create a reoccurring event (e.g. Spring Art Show) and/or an event everyone will remember and accredit to your organization.

Get the word out about your event.

- Pitch a story to your local media.
- Send out a media advisory, inviting your local media to attend.
- Create a flier or an annual calendar of events and post in various locations around your community (e.g., at local businesses, the public library and on your organization's web site).
- Send press releases, public service announcements and calendar listings to your local media.
- Send notices to newsletters of local civic groups, churches, hospitals and neighborhood associations.

## **CAPE CORAL MODEL**

Beginning in November 2005, the Cape Coral CRA held meetings with local downtown business owners and retailers to brainstorm about how to bring people to the downtown area. Since this initial, very successful meeting, the CRA has hosted a variety of special events, including:

- Food and Wine Tasting Festival
- Tribute to New Orleans: featuring the Battle of the Chefs and Jazz Around Town
- Four Paws for the Cause: a pet-friendly event to raise money for the fight against breast cancer

They even created a campaign called, “Keep It In the Cape.” Through these events, the CRA has built and maintained a positive relationship with the Cape Coral community. Furthermore, they have continued to *include* the downtown business owners by holding monthly meetings to discuss progress and plans for the downtown area.

## Cape Coral CRA Special Event Pictures



Photos courtesy of Cape Coral Daily Breeze  
and the Cape Coral CRA.



## Special Event Planning Considerations and Check List

- ❑ Event format (e.g., groundbreaking, ribbon-cutting, open house, festival, tour)
- ❑ Timing (e.g., weekday or weekend, time of day, duration, consider availability of VIPs & guests, attendance by media, traffic conditions, safety, weather and lighting)
- ❑ Location (e.g., accessibility, space, parking, electrical needs and aesthetics)
- ❑ Guest lists
  - Internal (e.g., execs, board members, staff, developers and “friends”)
  - External (e.g., business owners; residents; VIPs; business and civic leaders; state, county and city government officials; local and state related/relevant industry leadership, including top companies; associations and lobbyists; local and state news; consumer and trade media)
- ❑ Invitations (with map), RSVPs and follow-up/reminder calls
- ❑ Catering (e.g., food and beverage service)
- ❑ Entertainment and recreational activities (e.g., music, games, hot-air balloon rides, helicopter rides, etc.)
- ❑ Public-address system and stage (or delineated staging area)
- ❑ Land clearing and preparation (e.g., hay or straw as ground cover; landscaping; beware of mud, dirt and dust)
- ❑ Check weather forecasts (contingencies for conditions, including wind)
- ❑ Tents, tables, chairs
- ❑ Sign-in registration (name badges, drawings for prizes, database for “thanks” cards)
- ❑ Electrical power (e.g., generator, extension cords)
- ❑ Parking, attendants and traffic control
- ❑ Signage (directional for road, parking and banners for “Welcome to ...”)
- ❑ Hosts/hostesses (welcome guests)
- ❑ Decorations (balloons, ribbon, centerpieces for tables, etc.)
- ❑ Trash receptacles
- ❑ Restrooms/facilities
- ❑ Commemorative gifts and/or door prizes via drawings (e.g., paper weights, tote bags, attachés, shirts, jackets, hats, mugs, leather coasters, luggage tags, potted plants, etc.)
- ❑ Information dissemination (e.g., displays, handouts, printed program/agenda, etc.)
- ❑ Participants (e.g., master of ceremonies, speakers, ribbon-cutters, groundbreakers)
- ❑ Identify VIPs to be recognized
- ❑ Scripts for speeches
- ❑ Props (e.g., shovels and hard hats for groundbreakings; ribbon and scissors for ribbon-cuttings, etc.)
- ❑ Photography and/or videotaping of event
- ❑ PR/publicity (e.g., advisories for media attendance, press releases, fact sheets and press kits; captioned photos after)
- ❑ “Thank you” cards (post-event to attendees)